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8 Apr 53

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THE NEW COMMUNIST PROPOSAL ON POW'S

This paper

used for

NSC Briefing 8 Apr.

Chinese Communist Premier Chou En-lai's 30 March proposal on the disposition of POW's came only four days after his return from Moscow, and Soviet spokesmen were quick to endorse the proposal both privately and publicly. Evidence is convincing that the Communist position in the Korean war continues to be based on Sino-Soviet consultation and joint decisions.

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Other recent evidence reflects a more conciliatory attitude of the Soviet Union toward the West. These tactics appear

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DOCUMENT NO. 2
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. IF
IT DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: 2010
AUTH: HR 702
DATE: 1-2-80 REVIEWER: 372044

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designed at least to obtain negotiations on various outstanding East-West issues and may foreshadow a new tactical approach to achieving basic cold war objectives.

Chou's proposal is a major departure from the previous Communist position in that it provides for the immediate repatriation of those POW's willing to return and for the transfer to a "neutral state" of those POW's unwilling to be repatriated. The proposal does not commit the Communists, however, to meet UN conditions regarding the timing of a cease-fire, nor does it define a "neutral state," nor does it make clear the disposition of POW's who remain unwilling to be repatriated after Communist "explanations" to them.

The Communists continue to affirm their commitment to the principle of total repatriation. Moreover, they continue to insist that all POW's who have refused repatriation have done so only because of UN pressure on them.

The Communists thus may seek an immediate cease-fire without surrendering their total-repatriation principle. They may also attempt to have designated as the "neutral state" one which would, sooner or later, return all of their POW's to them. They may try to obtain veto power in the body which is to process the POW's. Or they may seek a provision enabling them to make "explanations" to the POW's indefinitely. The UN commander in Korea has requested from the Communists detailed suggestions for implementing Chou's proposal.

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Despite the many possible stumbling-blocks in Chou's proposal, most observers feel that it signifies a Communist intention eventually to forego the fact of total repatriation if not the principle. The Communists appear to believe that their "explanations" will induce a change of mind in the great majority of those prisoners unwilling to be repatriated. The Communists may well feel that they can accept and explain away the continued refusal of a few thousands of POW's.

Molotov's statement endorsing the proposal suggested that the Communists may seek to transfer the truce talks from Panmunjom to the UN General Assembly and may again press for admission of Communist China, North Korea, and Outer Mongolia to the UN. There is also the possibility of a Soviet or neutralist resolution in the UN couched in terms which, while failing to commit the Communists, would attract broad popular support and would place the United States in the apparent position of being unwilling to make peace.

Assuming Communist sincerity in the new proposal, the Communists may be expected to reassert their earlier demands for a general conference on Far Eastern questions. Both sides have agreed to recommend such a conference within 90 days of an armistice. The Communists would certainly attempt to raise, in such a conference, issues on which they know a wide difference of opinion to exist among Western and Asian non-Communist states.

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Among these issues are the presence of Western military forces in the Far East, Communist China's and North Korea's claims to seats in the UN, Peiping's assertion of sovereignty over Formosa, the growing strength of Japan, the wars in Indochina and Malaya, and the activity of Chinese Nationalist forces in Burma.

In such a conference, the Communists would strive to promote discord among anti-Soviet allies, to stimulate Western sentiment favoring disengagement from costly and indecisive Far Eastern conflicts, to fan anti-Western sentiment, and to capitalize on the still widespread ignorance of and apathy toward Communism in the Far East.

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